

## AN ANALYSIS OF TRENDS IN JABA AUTHORSHIP

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Because the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* is recognized as a prominent journal in applied behavior analysis, a description of authorship trends may be important for discerning developments in the discipline. The analyses reported herein address trends from 1975 through 1997 in the publication of articles by new authors and the appearance of articles authored by frequent contributors. The data reveal a trend away from the appearance of new authors with an increase in the publication of works by frequent contributors. These trends are shown to be more conspicuous than in comparison data from the *American Journal on Mental Retardation*.

DESCRIPTORS: *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, publication history

Because the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (JABA) is recognized as a leading periodical in its title discipline, its contents have been examined to discern trends in various features of applied behavior analysis. For example, Hayes, Rincover, and Solnick (1980) analyzed trends in four defining dimensions of applied behavior analysis, and Northup, Vollmer, and Serret (1993) described trends in a number of topographical features including settings, target behaviors, and participants. In addition, some attention has been paid to authorship trends and significant contributors (e.g., Mathews, 1997). For example, a recent issue provided a listing of the most prolific JABA authors ("Authors with 10 or More Articles," 1993). Thus, questions can be raised about possible tendencies toward the publication of articles authored by frequent contributors and whether the appearance of new authors has become more or less common. Such an analysis may

have significance beyond a parochial curiosity because, conceivably, the data could reflect trends in the discipline toward a convergence versus dispersal of research influence in the field.

### METHOD

All articles from the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* published between 1970 and 1997 were examined. Descriptive features of each article were summarized as part of a larger compilation of applied research across multiple journals. For the current analysis, all articles (with the exception of published abstracts and book reviews) were entered in a separate database that included the article's title, year of publication, and the name of each author. The database permitted calculations of the total number of articles authored or coauthored by an individual over a specified period of time. Each issue of the journal was reviewed independently by two data recorders who wrote down the descriptive information and then compared their records prior to entering the information in the database. Agreement was 100% for the selection and recording of each article.

The data were analyzed to answer three questions. First, to determine the extent to

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We thank Miriam Steiner for assistance with data collection and many respected colleagues for their suggestions and comments on prepublication drafts.

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which unfamiliar authorship groups were more or less represented in *JABA*'s contents, we asked, "What percentage of articles in a given volume (e.g., 1981) had no author with a publication in the previous five *JABA* volumes (e.g., 1976–1980)?" This information was obtained by counting the number of articles authored only by individuals with no *JABA* publications in the previous 5 years and dividing the sum by the total number of articles in that volume.

The second and third questions pertained to the proportion of a volume's contents that were produced by frequent contributors. Specifically, the second question was, "What is the percentage of articles in a given volume of *JABA* (e.g., 1981) that had at least one author with five or more publications in the previous five *JABA* volumes (e.g., 1976–1980)?" To answer this question, each article in a given volume was identified as to whether it was authored by at least one individual who had five or more articles in the previous five *JABA* volumes. Then, the sum of those articles was divided by the total number of articles in the volume, providing the desired percentage. The third question was, "What is the percentage of articles in a given volume of *JABA* (e.g., 1981) that had at least one author with 10 or more publications in the previous five *JABA* volumes (e.g., 1976–1980)?" This was answered with procedures that were the same as for the previous question, except that the criterion for counting an article was increased to 10 previous publications. The calculated percentages for each target volume were then plotted to permit visual analysis of trends in authorship patterns.

For comparison purposes, the procedures of the study were replicated with a second journal, the *American Journal on Mental Retardation* (*AJMR*). *AJMR* was selected because it was published consistently over the same years of analysis, because it is highly regarded, and because it focuses on research

in developmental disabilities, the most common population studied in *JABA*. Reliability was 100% for the selection and coding of *AJMR* articles.

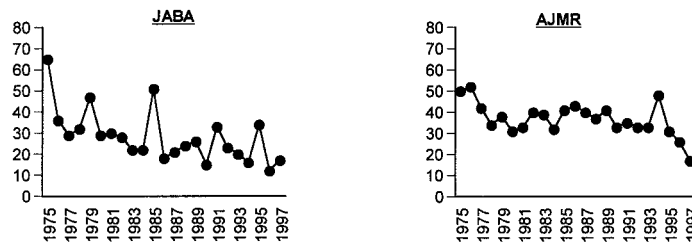
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows the percentage of articles per *JABA* and *AJMR* volume authored by new and veteran contributors. The data show declining trends in the percentage of articles with unfamiliar authors for both journals, with the trend for *JABA* being more pronounced. Between 1975 and 1997, *JABA*'s figures declined from 65% to 17%; for *AJMR*, the figures were 50% and 17%.

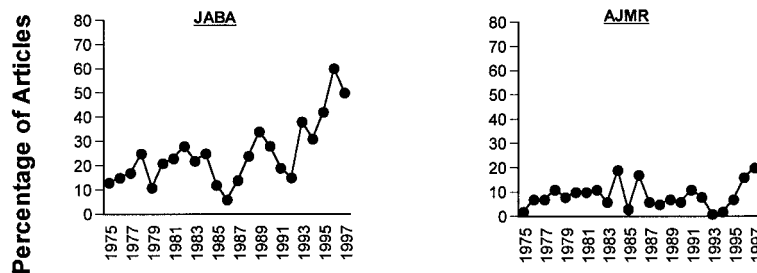
In regards to the appearance of frequent contributors, the data for *JABA* show clear evidence of increasing trends, especially since 1994. The percentage of articles with an author having at least five appearances in the previous five volumes increased from 13% in 1975 to 50% in 1997 (and 60% in 1996); for 10 appearances in the previous 5 years, the percentages rose from 0% in 1975 to 41% in 1997. In contrast, the trends for *AJMR* are not as notable, and the percentages are generally low.

The present data emerge from one method of analyzing authorship trends, and it is acknowledged that there are numerous ways to conduct such examinations. For instance, it would be possible to address the current questions by examining trends in the appearance of first authors. Also, there are numerous other phenomena in authorship that could be studied. For example, it would be interesting to consider the diversity and representativeness of authors in regards to geographic, cultural, ethnic, and other variables. Similarly, it would be valuable to determine whether the trends might be associated with, or even produced by, changes in such variables as the content, methodologies, submission and acceptance rates, or other factors related to currently published research. In

## 1. Authors with No Publications in Previous 5 Years



## 2. An Author with at Least 5 Publications in Previous 5 Years



## 3. An Author with at Least 10 Publications in Previous 5 Years

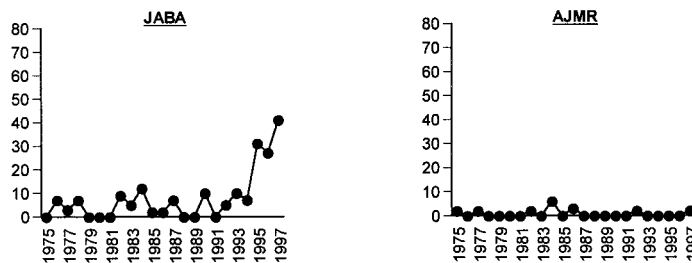


Figure 1. Percentage of articles in *JABA* and *AJMR* in which (a) no author had any publications in the journal during the previous 5 years (top graphs); (b) at least one author had a minimum of five publications in the journal during the previous 5 years (middle graphs); and (c) at least one author had a minimum of 10 publications in the journal during the previous 5 years (bottom graphs).

addition, further investigation could examine trends in other journals, including other behavioral journals and periodicals that focus on basic research.

The most salient findings from the current investigation reveal clear trends away from the publication of new authorship groups and toward the repeated publication of *JABA* veterans. Indeed, the data pertaining to the recent escalation in the appearance of very frequent authors are particularly striking. Although interpretation of these

findings is difficult, the data may indicate that *JABA* is beginning to occupy, or establish, a more specialized role in the arena of applied behavior analysis. As the methods and principles of behavior analysis have become more widely adopted, applied behavioral researchers have increasing options for publication and have developed an array of models with which they describe their behavior-analytic contributions (Wahler, 1996). In the context of this progressive development and spread of the discipline, it is

possible that the flagship journal is coming to fill a more specialized niche, perhaps one that favors unique knowledge, interests, laboratories, methodological techniques, or resources. Whatever the interpretation, it is hoped that the current data inspire discussion among members of the field regarding *JABA's* role and its appropriate responsibility for leadership and cultivation of optimal and representative products and participation.

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*Received October 9, 1997*

*Initial editorial decision December 17, 1997*

*Final acceptance March 5, 1998*

*Action Editor, R. Mark Mathews*